

VZCZCXR05854  
PP RUEHDBU RUEHPW  
DE RUEHBUL #0433 0600300  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 010300Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7528  
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS KABUL 000433

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A,

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL AF

SUBJECT: SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE HOLBROOKE AND KHALILI FOCUS  
ON ELECTIONS

¶1. (SBU) During a February 13 meeting, Special Representative Holbrooke and Vice President Khalili focused on upcoming Afghan presidential elections. Khalili emphasized elections had to take place before the constitutionally mandated date of May 21 to avoid a crisis of legitimacy. If President Karzai remained in office, he would be illegitimate, but if a third party became interim president, it could lead to a bigger crisis. Holbrooke encouraged Khalili and his fellow leaders to find a pragmatic solution in order to prevent a political crisis on May 22.

¶2. (SBU) Khalili noted according to the Constitution, the Speaker of the Upper House of Parliament should become the interim president if the president resigns. He stated the United Front believed Upper House Speaker Mujadeddi was too old to be president. Khalili personally did not oppose Mujadeddi as an interim leader. Khalili accepted the logistical and security difficulties of a spring election, but emphasized the government should be legitimate. He argued that a delay in elections would make Karzai more powerful. He did allow if all political parties and players agreed to August elections, he would also support the later date. Khalili told Holbrooke that he did not intend to be a presidential candidate in this year's election, since Afghanistan was not yet ready for a Hazara Shi'a president.

¶3. (U) Ambassador Holbrooke's party cleared this message.  
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